

Whitney Fellowship Membership Booklet

I. Introduction

The members of Whitney Fellowship would like to thank you for your interest in our fellowship. The propose of this booklet is to let you know who we are and what we believe. The Bible says in **Amos 3:3 (NLT)- Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?** It is very important as a fellowship that we are all walking in the same direction. In order to do that there are some basic beliefs we all must agree on.

There are a lot of things in the Christian life, the Christian walk, that are not essentials. They are open to however you interpret them, as you study, as you pray, as you ask God to show you. There are some things you're going to differ from other people on. We consider many of these to be nonessentials and, in those, there's liberty. In those we can have diversity.

For instance: Is this a charismatic church? This is not a charismatic church, but we are not anti-charismatic. There are people in this church who are charismatic, who practice speaking in tongues and who believe that is an important part of their faith and their walk with God. Because we don't believe it's essential for salvation, it's not one of the things we should get uptight about. Since it is one of the gifts of the Spirit that God gives to whomever He will, we say you have liberty.

If God has given you that gift, that's great, as long as you don't try to tell everybody else they have to have the same gift. That's one example.

The point is: in essential things we must have unity. And in all things we have love; we have charity.

The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:2 -**If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.**

The bottom line is that we have unity in the things that matter, that we allow each other liberty in the things that aren't as important, and above everything

else we relate to each other in a loving way.

This is a church made up of people just like you. Imperfect, sinners, saved by the grace of God, who make mistakes. You have to make a decision, if you're going to join this church, that you will have a loving heart toward those you meet and that you would be willing to do work of reconciliation and forgiveness if it's ever needed.

You're going to need it! You're going to need to learn. to forgive and you're going to have to be willing to do that if you're going to join here. We don't want people to join this church who aren't willing to go through that process.

If you decide to join, you must come with an attitude that says "when I run into trouble or difficulties with someone, I promise before God to do what the Bible says, and that is to work through it with a loving heart to reconciliation and forgiveness. "

II. Our Statement of Faith - What We Believe

If you are going to join WF church, you need to be in harmony with the following things. These are things we need to agree on. If, while reading this, you ever think, "I don't know about ..." please wait and talk to me before you decide to join. These are things we believe are essential. These are things we need to be united in thought and purpose on. In the essentials we need to have unity.

Ephesians 4:4-6 - There is one body and one Spirit, there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all. (Essential)

A. The Essentials We Believe:

1. God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has eternally existed in three personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.

2. Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again some day to earth to reign as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

3. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son of God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He gives every believer a spiritual gift or gifts when they are saved. As Christians, we seek to live under His control daily.

4. The Bible

The Bible is God's Word to us. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. Because it is inspired by God, it is the truth without any mixture of error.

5. Human Beings

People are made in the spiritual image of God, to be like Him in character. People are the supreme object of God's creation. Although every person has tremendous potential for good, all of us are marred by an attitude of disobedience toward God called "sin". This attitude separates people from God and causes many problems in life.

6. Salvation

Salvation is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offering of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith, we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith.

7. Eternal Security

Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the true believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. If you have been genuinely saved, you cannot "lose" it. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and "keeping power of God" that gives us this security.

8. Eternity

People were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence.

9. Autonomy of the local church

Jesus Christ is the head of this church, not the elders. Jesus Christ is the head of this church, the recognized honored head of this church. Because of that, we are a body and we work together. He is the source of our life.

There is value in associating with other Christians, other groups of Christians. But this church makes its own decisions about its land, its property. No denominational control from outside can tell us what to do. This church makes its own decisions about those kinds of things. We are autonomous.

10. Priesthood of every believer

Nobody here wears special clothes, a special collar or a special robe. You and I are all priests before God. We don't need anybody to stand between us and God anymore. Jesus Christ did that by His death and resurrection. You don't need another human being to stand on your behalf in front of God. Because of that we all have equal access to God.

11. Tithing

Lev. 26:30 - A tithe of everything you produce belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.

The word tithing simply means ten percent. It's the way we finance this church. We don't finance it through bingo or raffles or any kind of gimmicks like that. We finance this church through the members giving ten percent of what they earn back to the church.

Nobody's ever going to come check up on you. Nobody's ever going to knock on your door and say, "You're about three months behind. Let's cough up some back pay!" Never! It's between you and God. We feel like if we teach you what the Bible says, then it becomes something between you and God. It is the responsibility of the people who commit themselves to membership here to give and support the work of the church.

12. Baptism by immersion

Colossians 2:12 - When you were baptized you were buried with Christ and in baptism you were also raised with Christ.

The picture of baptism is being buried under water just as Christ was buried in the tomb and raised into a new way of life. Baptism is simply a picture of what has happened on the inside.

13. Spirit-led living

John 15:5 - Jesus said, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. But apart from Me, you can do nothing.'

This is something we believe deeply. He is the source of our life not just for salvation, but for everyday. Everyday, when you get up, you must reconnect yourself, not in terms of salvation, but in terms of dependence saying, "God, I depend on You to get me through this day". He is our power source in life.

B. The Subject of Salvation

Galatians 3:26-28 - For now we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ [notice it's not through church, not through baptism, not through good works; it says through faith in Jesus Christ we become children of God] and we

who have been baptized into union with Christ are enveloped by Him. We are no longer Jews or Gentiles or slaves or free men or even merely men or women. But we are all the same. We are Christians. We are one in Jesus Christ.

This says that when you become a believer and you become a part of God's family, in God's eyes all of the distinctions are wiped out. The church is a united family. There is no place for discrimination. There is no place for racism. It says we're all the same in God's eyes. We're all equally valuable to Him in the family of God.

The Bible teaches very clearly that you were put on this earth for two reasons:

1. God made you so He could love you.

God says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love."

Ephesians 1:4-5 - Even before the world was made, God had already chosen us to be His through our union with Christ because of His love. God had already decided that through Jesus Christ He would make us His children. This was God's pleasure and purpose.

You were created to be loved by God.

2. You were created to enjoy a personal relationship with God and to manage all of the rest of God's creation. This makes you special.

Gen. 1:27-28 (LB)- So God created human beings, making them in His image. He blessed them, and said, ... live all over the earth and bring it under control. I am putting you in charge.

God said, I am putting human beings over all the rest of creation and they are to manage the rest of the world. He gave that responsibility to Adam and Eve and then on to us. The benefit is that when we manage it as God's representatives we get to enjoy it.

Jesus said in John 10:10 - I have come in order that you might have life, life in all its fullness.

If Jesus came to give us life, it means we're not really living until we know Jesus. In fact, you're just existing until you know Christ, because you were made to love God and to be loved by Him, to know Him and to be known by Him.

When we know and love God, it produces all kinds of positive benefits in our lives. It provides a clear conscious. It provides purpose in life, peace, joy and fulfillment. These are all benefits of having a relationship to Christ. I'm not talking about a religion. I'm talking about a personal relationship **with** Christ.

This is the kind of lifestyle that God intends for us to live. Why then aren't most people really happy? What's the problem? Here's the problem: Man has a natural desire to be boss and to ignore God's principles for living. You can see this all the time in our society around us. You hear phrases like, "Look out for number one" ... "Do your own thing" and "If it feels good, do it".

In other words, we want to be our own boss. We don't want God to be our boss. The Bible calls this attitude **sin**. In the word "sin", the middle letter is "I". "I want to do my own thing". "I want to be my own boss". "I want to live my own life the way I want to regardless of God". The Bible says we all have this problem within us.

Isaiah 53:6 - All of us like sheep have gone astray and each of us have turned to his own way.

Today we'd say, "All of us have gone astray and everybody's doing their own thing."

1 John 1:8 -If we say we never sin we're only fooling ourselves and we refuse to accept the truth.

The sad part is that sin breaks our close relationship to God and it causes us to run from God and to try to live our lives outside of His will.

Isaiah 59:2 - The trouble is that your sins have cut you oft from God.

Romans 3:23 - All have sinned and fall short of God's glorious ideal.

When it says "all", does that include Billy Graham? Yes. The pope? Yes. We have

all sinned. There's no perfect person in the world.

Here is the myth that most people have. They think in their mind that God has a scale and on one side are my bad works, all the bad things I've done, and on the other side are all the good things. If somehow I manage to do more good in my life than bad then God's going to let me into heaven. That's just not true. In the first place, the Bible says heaven is a perfect place. Only perfect people get to go there. If God let imperfect people into heaven, then it wouldn't be perfect anymore.

You say, "If only perfect people get to go to heaven, then I don't stand a chance." You're right. You don't and neither do I. So God had to come up with a Plan whereby we could get in on somebody else's ticket who was perfect. His name was Jesus Christ.

The Plan was God saying, "I'll come in the form of a human being and I'll be called Jesus Christ. I will live a perfect life and I'll let people see what God is really like in human form. Then I'll die on the cross and pay for their sins so, if you trust in Me, you can come into heaven on My ticket." It sounds like a good deal.

God, Himself, came to earth as a human being to bring us back to Himself. If any other way would have worked, Jesus Christ would not have had to come. The Way is not a religion, the Way is not a path, the Way is a person. God wants you to know Him personally.

Jesus has already taken care of your sin problem. "The wages of sin is death, [that's the bad news; then the good news] the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

What does it mean to be a Christian? It means to put your faith in Christ.

What does God want you to do? Four things:

1. Admit

Here's what it means to be a Christian. First you admit. I admit that God has not been first place in my life and I ask Him to forgive my sins.

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins He's faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from every wrong.

2. Believe

I believe that Jesus Christ died to pay for my sins and that He rose on Easter and is alive today.

Romans 10:9 - If you confess that Jesus is your Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

"Will". It doesn't say you might be. It doesn't say you can hope to be. It says you will. If you call on the name of the Lord He says, "I will". God will not lie.

3. Accept God's free gift of salvation.

Don't try to earn it. Ephesians 2:8,9 - It is by grace you are saved through faith and it is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God. Not of works so no one could boast.

Our relationship to Christ is not restored by anything we do, but on the basis of what Jesus Christ already did for us on Calvary.

4. Invite Jesus Christ to come into my life and be the director or Lord of my life.

John 1:12-13 - To all who receive Him, He gives the right to become children of God.

All we need to do is to trust Him to save us. All those who believe this are reborn - not a physical rebirth ...but from the will of God!

Have you seen these stores that say, "Under new management"? I think every new Christian should wear that sign for a month. That's what it means to be a Christian. I'm under new management. No longer am I calling the shots in my life. Jesus Christ is the manager of my life. He's the CEO. He's the President, the boss-man. He's the director of my life.

You can take these steps by praying a simple prayer of commitment to God.

"Dear Jesus, Thank you for making me and loving me even when I've ignored You and gone my own way. I realize I need You in my life and I'm sorry for my sins. I ask You to forgive me. Thank You for dying on the cross for me. Please help me to understand it more. As much as I know how, I want to follow You from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I accept Your gift of salvation. Please help me to grow as a Christian. Amen."

III. Formal Membership

At WF, we recognize the need for a formal membership. We ask you to commit to membership in our church for four reasons.

A. 4 Reasons to make this commitment

1. A Biblical Reason

Christ is committed to the church and it shows obedience to what He is committed to. The Bible says, "Christ loved the church and gave His life for it." Every once in a while I'll hear somebody say, "I like Jesus, I just don't like the church" or, "I'm committed to Christ, but I don't want to be committed to any local church" or, "I like Christ but I don't need the church".

Whenever I hear any of that, I know one thing: he or she is an immature believer. The more mature you grow as a Christian, the more you're going to love the church. The Bible says the church is the bride of Christ and the body of Christ. What if I said to you, "I like you. I just can't stand your body". You'd be offended by that. The Bible says the church is the bride of Christ.

The Bible says Jesus died for the church. He gave His life for it. The more like Christ you become, the more you're going to be willing to give your life for the church. It's not perfect but it's what Jesus died for. If we're going to be like Christ, we must be as committed to the church as He is.

2. A Cultural Reason

It is an antidote to our society. We live in an age where very few people want

to be committed to anything ... a job, a marriage, a church, a country. This attitude has produced a generation of church shoppers and church hoppers. They hop around from one church to another. Membership swims against the current of America's consumer religion. It is an unselfish decision. Commitment always builds character.

3. A Practical Reason

It defines who can be counted on. Every ball team must have a roster. Every school must have an enrollment. Every business has a staff. Every army has an enlistment. Even our country takes a census. Membership identifies who's in our family and who's not.

4. A Personal Reason

Membership produces spiritual growth. The New Testament places a major emphasis on the need for Christians to be accountable to each other for spiritual growth. You can't be accountable when you're not committed to any specific church family.

We're not into rituals or organization or simply signing your name on a piece of paper and it meaning nothing. That's not what membership is all about. We're talking about a step in your personal development.

B. What is expected of you as a Member?

At WF we never ask our members to do more than the Bible clearly teaches. We only expect our members to do what the Bible expects every Christian to do.

These responsibilities are spelled out in our Membership Covenant.

"Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and been baptized, and being in agreement with WF's statements, strategy, and structure, I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite with Whitney Fellowship. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following..."

1. I will protect the unity of my church by acting in love toward the other members, refusing to gossip, and by following the leaders.

Rom 15:5 (LB)- Live in complete harmony with each other - each with the attitude of Christ toward each other.

If you join this church, you're going to find out real quick it's filled with imperfect human beings. If you're not willing to commit to loving the other people of this church, don't join.

By refusing to gossip -- Eph. 4:29 - Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what builds up others.

What destroys churches more than anything else is gossip. Gossip is when you're either part of the problem, nor part of the solution, but you're talking about it. When you share information about a problem and you're neither part of the problem nor part of the solution and you talk about it, you are gossiping. The Bible calls it sin. And you promise if you join this church to not gossip. So if you hear something about somebody in the church, what do you do?

A. You go directly to that person and talk to them. You don't go talking to another person about somebody else ... Or

B. You call one of the pastors -- and say, "Pastor, what's the scoop here?" If we don't know, we'll help you find out. But you don't start this rumor mill that causes all kinds of problems in churches.

I will protect the unity by following the leaders.

Heb. 13: 17 - Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them that their work will be a joy and not a burden for that would be no advantage to you.

2. I will share the responsibility of my church by praying for its growth, by inviting others to attend and by warmly welcoming those who visit.

The difference between being an attender and member is like being on a cruise ship. If you're an attender, you're just along for the ride. If you're a member, you're actually a crew member. When you join the church, it's your job to reach out and bring others in, as a crew member.

Rom. 15:7 (LB) - So, warmly welcome each other into the church just as Christ has warmly welcomed you then God will be glorified.

3. I will serve the ministry of my church by discovering and using my gifts and talents.

4. I will support the testimony of my church by attending faithfully, by living a godly life, and by giving regularly.

IV. Keys truths about the church

Eph. 2:19 (LB)- You are a member of God's very own family ...and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.

1. The church is a family.

It doesn't say the church is like a family. It says the church is a family. It's a spiritual family, and it is eternal.

2. God expects you to be a **member** of a church family.

Notice he says, "You are a member of God's very own family." That says it's God's will. It's not optional. Every Christian needs a church family.

A Christian without a church family is like a person who says, "I want to play football but I don't want to be a part of any team". The fact is, we need each other to be strong in our Christian faith.

You need to understand when the word "church" is used in the Bible, it's used two different ways. First it's used to refer to every Christian who has ever lived throughout history. That's called the universal church. Every believer all around the world regardless of their denominational label, regardless of whether they meet in a church building, out in a tent, or in a little hut somewhere in the world, is part of the universal church.

But the other way the word "church" is used is to refer to a local group, a specific place. Like the church at Corinth, or like the church here at WF. It's used in a local sense.

The word "church" is only used four times in the Bible to refer to the universal Church. Every other time you see the word "church" in the Bible it's used to refer to a specific group of believers.

When you become a believer (give your heart to Jesus) you automatically become a part of the universal church of God. But you don't become a part of a local church until you make that choice.

It's like when you are born physically, you automatically become a part of the human race. You don't have a choice on that. But you don't become a part of a local family until somebody takes you home from the hospital.

That's what we're talking about here. You need to be a part of a local church family. I've had people say to me, "I don't need to be a part of a local church. I'm a part of the invisible church."

Well, that's great. When you get sick and are in the hospital, who visits you? The invisible pastor?

There are over thirty commands in the Bible you cannot obey, or follow, unless you become part of a local church family.

3. A Christian without a church family is an orphan.

Only in America do we have popcorn believers. These are people who, every week or so pop around to a different church. The Bible says, if you're a Christian, you're a part of the body of Christ. You could be the hand, the ear, the eyes, the nose, or the liver.

What would you say if your liver said, "I think for one week I'll be a part of this body over here and the next week I'll be a part of that body over there and the week after that I'll be a part of this body over here ..." Pretty soon what's going to happen is an unconnected liver that shrivels up and dies. You need to be a faithful part of a local church family.

What's the difference between being a Christian and being a member of a church family? The difference is the word "**commitment**".

I become a Christian by committing my life to Christ. I become a member of a local church by committing myself to other Christians. I say, "That's going to be my church home, my church family."

V. Our Church Strategy

Every church has a strategy behind it. Some are spoken, some are unspoken; some are effective, some are ineffective. There are many types of strategies for churches. Some churches have the strategy to reach people who like solemn, orderly, dignified churches.

Some churches have the strategy of real emotional churches. Some churches are real casual. Some are real formal. They may be teaching the same thing about Jesus, but they have a different style.

Churches have different styles. No church can appeal to everybody.

From the very beginning of WF, it has been our goal to reach people who have not been in church for years and to be a Fellowship where the hurting, the depressed, the frustrated, the lonely and the confused can find love, acceptance, help, hope, forgiveness, guidance, and encouragement. Why?

Jesus said in Mark 2: 17 - I didn't come for the people who are well. I came for people who are sick.

The great physician (Jesus) didn't come to be with healthy people. He said, I want to heal the unhealthy people.

Likewise, this church was founded to reach people who either have no church background or those who have become sick of religion.

Part of our strategy is to make a service comfortable for people who have never been in church before or have not been to church in awhile. You need to understand this because it will answer questions like: Why don't we just sing a bunch of hymns on Sunday morning? Why don't we take communion every Sunday morning? Why don't we have a come-forward invitation like Billy Graham crusades? Why don't we have an organ in the church? That's basically saying, "Why aren't

we more like the traditional church?" The answers to all of those questions become crystal clear when you understand our strategy. Our goal is to reach people who don't know the Lord and those who have been out of church for awhile.

We want people to come in, sit down, get their feet wet, listen for awhile, check it out, consider the claims of Christ. Why? Because most people today are skeptical of organized religion. "I don't mind Jesus and God. I just don't like organized religion." Great, come, we're disorganized religion.

Some churches are real emotional. Some churches are real formal. WF is kind of a middle of the road church. We're not so organized you can't sneeze if it's not in the bulletin. But we're not total chaos and people aren't hanging from the chandeliers, yet!

Most people around here prefer the casual and the informal over the formal. That's why we don't dress up.

VI. Our Church Structure

I want to talk to you about how WF is organized so you can get involved in our church. If you have come from another church background, take all the ways you thought a church should be organized and throw them out, and let me take you through the Bible and show you what the Bible says about how a church should be structured and organized.

Structure is like the skeleton. The Bible says that church is the body of Christ and every body has to have a skeleton. You have to have a skeleton to hold your body. Every church has a structure behind it. Some of them prevent growth, some of them cause growth. Some of them are good, some of them are bad.

1 Corinthians 14 - For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

We believe that the structure of the church should not be determined by culture, business practices, or even denominational traditions. We believe that the nature of the church determines its structure. In other words, what the church is, should determine how we organize. Voting, committees, boards, parliamentary procedure, majority rule, elections, board members -- what do these words have

in common?

Politics! Trouble! Bureaucracy! None of them are in the Bible. Not one of them. Yet how many churches do you know are organized around committees and boards and board members and voting and elections ... stuff like that. None of that is in the Bible.

What has happened over the years is that we have taken our culture, an American form of government which does have voting, elections, committees, majority rule ...and we've imposed it on the church. As a result, the church is often as effective as the government is, which isn't saying much.

So how should a church be organized? Let's look at what the Bible says.

I. The Church Is A **FELLOWSHIP**.

Acts 2:42 (Ph) - They continued steadily learning the teaching of the apostles, and joined in the fellowship ...

Fellowship is not just something the church is. It's something we do. What is fellowship? The best definition is "**Two fellows on the same ship.**"

As Christians, we're all headed to heaven. We're headed in the same direction. So the Bible says we're to have fellowship with each other. Because the Bible says the church is a fellowship, a top priority in fellowship is harmony and unity.

You can have unity without having uniformity. Have you noticed we're all different? We have different colored hair, different colored skin. We're different ages. We're different sizes. God loves that. God loves diversity. Thank God we're not all alike. It would really be boring if there was only vanilla ice cream in the world.

God made you to be a certain flavor and He wants you to be you. He doesn't want you to be anybody else. And no one flavor is better than any other flavor. When we talk about unity, we have unity because we're all saved by Jesus Christ, not because we all look alike, act alike, breathe alike, talk alike or even dress alike.

Eph. 4:3 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Rom. 14: 19 (Ph) - So let us concentrate on the things that make for harmony and the growth of our fellowship together.

The Bible teaches that anything that causes disunity is sin. When you cause conflict in a church, when you get Christians mad at other Christians, what you're doing is destroying the fellowship. And if you destroy the fellowship, you don't have a church.

The implications of this is that however you organize your church, a good structure should promote unity and downplay **differences**. We should organize in a way that minimizes our differences and maximizes what we have in common.

Implication: A good structure promotes unity and down plays **differences**.

The problem is that the way many churches are organized, they actually promote differences rather than downplay them. For instance, if a church votes on everything, every time you take a vote are you not causing people to take sides? So every time you take a vote, you're creating division in the church.

Paul talks about this in the Corinthian church. He says "Often your meetings do more harm than good." Have you ever been in a church meeting that did more harm than good? Most have.

The Bible says that anytime you divide the church, you're creating a division and that harms the fellowship. For that reason we don't and won't vote on a bunch of things here at this church. **Voting tends to create division.**

Voting is so foreign in the New Testament that there's not one example of voting in the New Testament. There is not one example of majority rule in the New Testament except when Paul was taken prisoner on the ship to Rome and he told them, "God's told me, even though I'm the prisoner, not to set sail. If you do, we're going to run into a storm." But the majority of the sailors thought it would be good anyway so they left. And the ship wrecked. The majority is often wrong. In the Old

Testament the majority of the Israelites wanted to go back to Egypt and Moses said, "No, we've got to keep going. We've got to go to the Promised Land."

A church is not a democracy. A church is a theocracy. In other words, God Is in charge and our job is to find out what God wants us to do and then do it.

At WF, we will only vote on:

- * Annual budget and legal trustees
- * Purchase of land or buildings
- * Calling elders (pastors)
- * Changes in the church constitution

But the point is, the church is a fellowship. So, we won't divide the church through many votes.

II. The Church Is **A FAMILY**.

Because the church is a family, that should effect how we're organized too. Is your family organized differently than the business you work at? Sure it is.

1 Peter 3:8 (LB) - You should be like one big happy family, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds.

So we operate on the basis of **RELATIONSHIP** not **RULES**.

The greater the relationship, the fewer rules you need. The stronger the relationship, the greater the trust. In a family you don't have a rule book. You don't have a policy manual for your family. You operate on the basis of relationships.

How are we to relate to one another? Like a family.

1 Tim. 5:1-2 (Ph) - Don't reprimand a senior member of the church, appeal to him as a father. Treat the young men as brothers, and the older women as mothers. Treat the younger women as sisters ...

If churches would just follow that verse, they'd have fewer problems. The Bible

says we're to treat each other like a family. We're to treat those who are more mature spiritually as spiritual fathers and mothers. And treat those who are about the same spiritual age or younger as spiritual brothers and sisters. We are a family.

The Bible says we're to value those who have been Christians longer than us and who are spiritually mature. How do you know who the spiritually mature are in a church? Simple. Look at their character. Look at their walk with the Lord.

III. The Church Is **A BODY**.

There are many verses in Scripture that say the church is the body of Christ. We're a body, not a business. We are an organism, not an organization.

Therefore at WF we function on the basis of **spiritual gifts (your abilities and talents), not elected offices**.

We are a body - not a business!

We are an organism - not an organization!

Therefore, we function on the basis of **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**, not **ELECTED OFFICERS**.

In other words, whatever you're good at, you ought to do in this church. And nobody's going to elect you to a position. If you're good at singing, you ought to be in the music ministry. If you're good with children, you ought to be in the children's ministry. If you're good at organizing, you ought to organize things in the church. If you're good at administration, you ought to be an administrator. If you're good with financial figures, you ought to be one of the accountants. If you're good at working with young people, you ought to work with young people. If you're good at teaching, you ought to be a teacher in this church. We don't elect anybody in this church. We are a body.

Did you elect your hand? No. Your hand is a hand because it can do hand things. Your throat gets to be a throat because it can swallow. Did you elect your eye? Your eye gets to be the eye because it can see.

The point is, whatever you're gifted at, that's your part in the body of Christ.

Rom. 12:4-6 - Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We each have different gifts according to the grace given us.

We each have different gifts according to the grace given to us. Whatever you're good at, that's what you **ought** to do in the body of Christ.

If you were to come to me and say, "I've got three hours a week to give to the church. How can I be involved in ministry?" The last thing I want to do is turn you into some bureaucrat and put you on some flower committee. Consider what you like to do, and do it when needed. When a need arises that you are inexperienced with, prayerfully consider helping alongside someone who is. It is amazing what you may learn and actually enjoy doing.

What's the difference between committees and ministries? We don't have any committees in our church, but we do have ministries. A committee discusses, a ministry acts. A committee discusses what they want other people to do. A ministry just does it. There are too many meetings in most churches.

Mary had a little lamb
It would have been a sheep
But it joined a Baptist church
And died from lack of sleep.

Will Rogers once said, "the government taxes people to build roads and Baptists wear them out going to meetings."

In an organization, "maintenance" becomes the focus. But in an organism, "ministry" is the focus.

At WF we have a simple structure so we can **maximize MINISTRY and minimize MAINTENANCE.**

Eph. 4:11-12 - God gave ...some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

As you look at that verse, who is to do the ministry of the church? The pastors

and teachers or the people? The people are to do the ministry. According to that, what are pastors and teachers supposed to do? Prepare God's people for ministry.

It's not my job to be a minister. **It's my job to equip you for your ministry.** I am a pastor, not a minister. I'm a minister simply because I'm a Christian. But every Christian is a minister. The Bible teaches this very clearly. One day you're going to stand before God and He's going to ask you two questions.

First, He's going to say, "What did you do with my Son, Jesus Christ?" And I hope you already know the answer to that one. "I've given my life to Him. I've made Him my Lord and Master. I've committed my life to Christ. I've accepted Him for salvation. "

Then He's going to say, "What did you do with what I gave you?" You have some talents. You have some abilities. You have some spiritual gifts. You have some natural inclinations, some interests. What did you do with them?

Our Structure as a Body means:

- The people are the **"MINISTERS"**.
- The pastors are the **"ADMINISTRATORS or OVERSEERS"**.

How does a ministry get started? It gets started when God births it in someone's heart. Don't we vote on it? Doesn't it have to go through some red tape and be approved by some board or committee? No, we don't do that around here. The person simply shares his or her idea with the elders and they decide if it is the right time to start that ministry.

That's the way God designed the church to operate 2000 years ago. That's the way WF operates. In our church the pastors, or elders, are responsible to keep the church committed to the Biblical vision, what the church should be doing. We keep the church on track, doctrinally straight so it doesn't become a cult or stray from its vision. But all the ministry is done, not by the pastors, but by the people.

IV. The Church Is **A FLOCK.**

This was Jesus' favorite description of the church. He called it "My little

flock". Therefore, the church is cared for and led by **shepherds**. Shepherds lead and feed.

God never meant for one man -- a super star pastor -- to meet everybody's needs. But He meant for all of us to be ministers, to minister to each other. We have all seen what happens when a church is built on a single personality. If that person dies or they have a moral failure, what happens? The ministry collapses. Therefore, it is only cared for and led by **SHEPHERDS**, but the people minister to each other, keeping each other strong and accountable.

Three different terms are used in the New Testament to refer to the same church leaders:

- "POIMEN" - in Greek means pastor or shepherd.
- "PRESBUTEROS" - means "elder" in Greek. "Presbyterian" comes from this.

Presbyterians call their leaders elders. It's a good, legitimate term. It's a Biblical term. It refers to spiritual maturity. An elder doesn't mean physically old. It means spiritual maturity. Timothy, as a young man, was the elder and chief pastor of the church at Ephesus. Paul says, "'You are the elder and you're the pastor at Ephesus. You are to appoint other elders."

- "EPISCOPOS" - is the word for "overseer" or "bishop". "Episcopalian" comes from this. They call their leaders "bishops." There's nothing wrong with that; that's a good Biblical word. Episcopos means "to oversee". Today, we call them a manager. Bishop means manager, supervisor, overseer. It's just an old English word for manager. It refers to the managing aspects of church leadership.

What's the difference between a pastor and an elder? An elder and a bishop? A bishop and a shepherd? A shepherd and an overseer? Nothing.

The words are used interchangeably in the New Testament. Americans are far more hung up on titles than they were in the New Testament. This is taught all through the New Testament.

How many pastors does our church have? Just one right now! Remember I'm not talking about ministers. Every Christian is a minister.

What do you call me? Actually you can just call me Dell. That's my name. I'm not into titles. If you want to call me Pastor Dell or Brother Dell, that's fine. I'm not picky.

That's the structure of our church. It's very different from the way most churches are organized. Here's what the value of it is. In some churches when you join the church, you become a member but you're still not part of the "in" crowd, a clique of power people who make all the decisions on where you get to serve. Maybe after you've been there five or six years, they will elect you to serve in some position. Not at WF. At WF you can join today and get involved tomorrow. We don't have a bureaucracy, a hierarchy where you have to jump through a bunch of hoops to get involved.

Membership Application. There are three requirements for membership here at WF. You must fulfill all three before you can be a member of this church.

1. You have committed your life to Jesus Christ and trusted Him for salvation.
2. You have been baptized after committing your life to Christ.
3. You have read and agree with the Membership Booklet.

If you would now like to become a member of Whitney Fellowship, just let me know! We would love for you to become a part of what God is doing here!

Pastor - Dell Glenn